**22 Pentecost**

**October 25, 2015**

**In the name of the God of all creation,**

**The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,**

**And the power of God known in the Spirit. Amen.**

Blind Bartimaeus. A blind man sitting beside the gate of the city begging. He heard that Jesus was coming and he called out. Those around him were annoyed by the spectacle he was causing and told him to shut up. But Jesus heard Bartimaeus and called him over. He asked Bartimaeus what he wanted, and Bartimaeus said he wanted his sight back. Jesus, said, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus.

Is this just a story about the miracle power of Jesus to heal a blind man? I don’t think so … I think it is much more than that. As far as I’m concerned, maybe the story literally happened or maybe it didn’t. That isn’t the point for me. The author of Mark’s gospel chose to include this story as he wrote about Jesus at least a generation after Jesus died, and I don’t think it was to just show that Jesus had some miraculous power to heal people. This is about someone who had lost their vision and then regained it … and then he followed Jesus. Bartimaeus was now taking seriously what Jesus took seriously. For me this story is about having a vision … not just eyesight, but vision … and about what happens if vision is lost, and what can happen if vision is regained. This is about one’s own vision, a vision shared by a family, and a vision shared by a community such as St. Cyprian’s. And to empower any vision one needs resources. This story is also a story about the currency of God and the currency of the world.

The story is rather straightforward: Bartimaeus is a beggar at the city’s gate. When he hears that Jesus is coming by he shouts, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Since he was making somewhat of a scene the people around him told him to be quiet, and yet he still shouted. Finally, Jesus calls him over and Bartimaeus throws off his cloak as he approaches Jesus. Jesus asked to Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” and the blind beggar responded, “My teacher, let me see again.”

Now for some this is just another miracle story … a story about Jesus’ power to restore this blind man’s sight. I agree. It is, indeed, a miracle. However, the miracle I see is not the restoration of sight, but the transformation of Bartimaeus … transformation from brokenness to wholeness … from dependence to independence … from beggar to self-sufficiency … from self-image of being a victim to a self-image of full humanity. This is also the story of moving from being dependent upon the world’s currency to living in the realm of God’s currency.

Consider the back-story of Bartimaeus for a moment. We don’t know how he became blind, but we do know that at one time he could see … he had responded to Jesus, “My teacher, let me see *again.*” And we don’t know how long he has been blind, but long enough to establish himself at the city gate dependent upon the generosity of those who would walk by him. Day after day, he found his way to his spot at the city gate and implored people to take pity on him. Bartimaeus was dependent upon the charitable generosity, in the currency of his world, of strangers to support his life. Can you imagine what that does to one’s self-image?

Then along came Jesus. Bartimaeus called out to him … and he was heard in spite of those in Jesus’ entourage who tried to silence the blind beggar. As Bartimaeus went to Jesus he threw off his cloak … and I’m sure he was throwing off a lot more. Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted. Wasn’t it obvious … he was a beggar … he wanted a handout in the currency of the world. But Jesus didn’t rely upon the obvious, he asked Bartimaeus what he wanted, and Bartimaeus replied, “Let me see again.”

With his sight restored Bartimaeus was no longer dependent upon others to guide him through the city streets … and the charity of others to sustain himself. He had made a choice to re-enter his community as a self-sufficient individual … with all its benefits, and all its responsibilities. He chose to live into the fullness of God’s image. This is not just a miracle story about Jesus’ power to heal blindness. It is about the transformation that is possible when one chooses to live life fully … with all its costs and promises.

In the early 1990’s Floyd Cochrane was a rising star in the Aryan Nation … a neo-Nazi organization that spout hatred towards Blacks, Jews, gays and others. Floyd’s picture had made its way to Time Magazine, and he appeared on national TV as a representative of this racist philosophy. Then, in 1992, he overheard the leaders of his organization say that Floyd’s son, who had been born with a cleft-palate, was going to have to be killed … no “birth-defects” in the families of the leaders of the Aryan Nation.

Floyd left that very night under the cover of darkness and sought protection, in of all places, the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center … the very organizations that were fighting the neo-Nazis. His eyes had been opened to what hate felt like, and he became a spokesperson exposing that hatred for what it was.

Floyd Cochrane spoke at my parish in Toledo, Ohio in the mid 1990’s. Even we did not know where he was staying … registered in a cheap motel under an assumed name. He was still being pursued by the Aryan Nation. But Floyd spoke about being blinded by hatred … blinded to the point that he could not see the humanity of a person behind the label that was being attached. He said that when he heard the others talking about killing his son something touched his heart in a way that he had long forgotten … and his eyes were opened. Like Blind Bartimaeus his sight had returned … and he was transformed.

You see, Blind Bartimaeus is also a story about being transformed from dependence upon the currency of the world, and entering the realm of God’s currency.

So what is the currency of God? Honesty. Integrity. Compassion. Humility. Justice. Mercy. Love. And there other denominations of this currency as well. It is the currency that when we spend it we are living in the image of God. It is the currency of healthy relationships … with each other, with our community, and with God. Jesus said to give to God the things that are God’s. So we give to God, and to God’s creation in the name of God, justice, and mercy; we offer our compassion and love; and we act in honesty with humility.

Throughout Holy Scripture God gives to the children of God, and asks that they give in return … in the same currency. Where there is injustice, God calls for justice; where there is pride, God calls for humility; where there is cruelty, God calls for compassion; where there is hatred God calls for love. God calls us to live in the image of the divine by spending the currency of God’s dominion. Yes, we live in the world, and we must transact business with the world’s currency, but we are encouraged to recognize the differences between the claims of the world and the claims of God, and not to confuse the two.

One sad irony of the story of Bartimaeus the blind beggar is that two thousand years later there are still beggars at the city gates. They stand on the side of the road with a handwritten cardboard signs that says they are homeless, or stranded, or out of work. Like Bartimaeus, I imagine their self-image is rather low. And we try to solve their problems, and our discomfort of having them in our city, by throwing the currency of the world at them. Certainly, some of the world’s currency for a new homeless shelter would help the dignity of anyone without a roof over their head, but a little of God’s currency might help as well. Some respect instead of pity, some compassion rather than ridicule, some acknowledgment of their existence as a child of God rather than ignoring them as if they were invisible … as if we were blind to their presence.

I don’t think it is a far stretch to see the analogy of this congregation’s recent life reflected in this blind beggar at the city gate. For almost our entire 120 year history this community of faith has been dependent upon the generosity of others. As far as we know, St. Cyprian’s was dependent upon the Diocese of Florida, and other churches … including Trinity Parish just a few blocks away … for financial support until just five years ago. However, the faith of the people of this community has called out for a renewed vision … a restoration of sight … and the cloak is being thrown off. St. Cyprian’s congregation is financially self-sufficient for the first time in its history. Not only that, two years ago we embarked upon a capital fund campaign to build the Commons at St. Cyprian’s. Our aim was to raise $75,000. Instead we raised over $130,000. This isn’t merely about our financial resources. It is about honoring our legacy with a vision for a full and faithful life in the future. It is about being transformed from being dependent upon the generosity of others in the currency of the world to living in the faith of God’s currency.

Like blind Bartimaeus we at St. Cyprian’s have been blessed with a vision … a restoration of sight. That vision, that blessing, that restoration of sight is a gift in God’s currency. It comes with responsibilities as well as benefits. Yes we need the world’s currency to meet the needs of the world … to keep the lights on, and paint the buildings, and to share our bounty with others. Yet that is just to sustain the vessel which holds this community as it spends God’s currency in the world around us. It is in spending God’s currency in this generation that allows us to honor the legacy that has been handed to us. We have been given the gift of a vision … along with it comes a responsibility. If we are to take seriously what Jesus took seriously we must provide for the future of this congregation in a way that allows us to participate in God’s dominion by spending the currency of God in our lives and in the world around us.

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To what are you blind? If you were to get your sight back what would be transformed in your life? Are you ready to “see” life in a new way and take seriously what Jesus took seriously? How will you choose to spend God’s currency?

Amen.